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FORK RIDGE SLIDE DESIGNATED ABANDONED MINE EMERGENCY

-Tazewell County slide, subsidence will be reclaimed under
Virginia Emergency Program -

Big Stone Gap, VA—Subsidence problems from abandoned underground mine workings in the Fork Ridge Community of Tazewell County damaged a residence and contributed to a landslide which blocked a portion of the Left Fork of Coal Creek on January 8, 1998, according to the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME). The subsidence area, slide and adjacent areas have been declared an abandoned mine land (AML) emergency by the DMME and federal Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement (OSMRE) and will be treated under Virginia's AML Emergency program.

Temporary measures were taken on Thursday, January 22, to clear the creek channel of slide debris to prevent potential flooding from heavy rain which had been forecast for the area. The slide area was also supported to prevent further material entering the creek and to stabilize the residential access road. DMME's Division of Mined Land Reclamation (DMLR) is now in the process of contracting for the engineering phase of the reclamation project. A contract for the construction will be bid by the DMLR as soon as the engineering is completed.

Reclamation construction, which will include treatment of subsidence near one residence, further clean-up and stabilization of the landslide, and additional work to completely restore unobstructed flow in the creek channel, will begin around the first week of March. DMME officials noted that, should the embankment slide again prior to reclamation construction, emergency measures will be taken to stabilize the area and keep the stream channel flowing freely.

Problems began in the Fork Ridge Community when a private road embankment slid into the creek following heavy rains on January 8. Initial investigations by the DMLR of citizen complaints turned up no evidence that past mining had contributed to the slide. A follow-up investigation of citizen concerns that nearby water-filled, underground mine workings may pose the danger of a 'blow-out' - the sudden release of impounded water - led to the discovery of subsidence damage to the land surface and one resident's home.

A final, joint investigation conducted by the DMLR and OSMRE on Thursday, January 22, determined that the subsidence and other related conditions posed a significant threat to the public's health and safety. An emergency declaration was finalized and temporary stream channel restoration measures were ordered. It is estimated that the underground mine workings responsible for the problems were developed in the early 1900's.

Funding for the project will come from the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Trust Fund which is supported by reclamation fees paid by the coal industry.

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